



Botswana

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 224,710 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.76 million. An estimated 70 percent of the country's citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, formerly the London Missionary Society, claim the majority of Christians. There also are congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. In recent years, the number of new religious groups, some of West African origin, has increased; these churches have begun holding services and drawing substantial crowds with a charismatic blend of Christianity and traditional indigenous religions. According to the most recent census (2001), the Muslim community, primarily of South Asian origin, numbers just over 5,000. The 2001 census also listed roughly 3,000 Hindus and 700 Baha'is. Members of both of these communities claimed that these figures significantly understated their numbers. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espoused no religion.

Religious services are well attended in both rural and urban areas.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Quakers, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites, and a number of independent evangelical and charismatic Christian groups.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. The Constitution also provides for the protection of the rights and freedoms of other persons, including the right to observe and practice any religion without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the Government. To register, a group submits its constitution to the Registrar of Societies within the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. After a generally simple but slow bureaucratic process, the organization is registered. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must be registered before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account in a local bank. Unregistered groups potentially are liable to penalties including fines up to \$100 (500 pula), up to 3 years in jail, or both. Thirteen religious organizations registered from July 2004 to April 2005. Unlike during the previous 12-month period, no religious organization was de-registered during the period covered by this report. During this time, 368 religious groups started the process of registration, but the Government terminated their applications after they failed to submit the required application forms, constitution, and fees within 90 days.

Religious education, with a primary emphasis on Christianity but which also addresses other religions in the country, is part of

the curriculum in public schools. The Constitution provides that every religious community may establish places for religious instruction at the community's expense. The Constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, or compulsory taking of oaths that run counter to an individual's religious beliefs.

There are no laws against proselytizing.

Only Christian holy days are recognized as public holidays. These include Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day. However, members of other religious groups are allowed to commemorate their religious holy days without government interference.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interests of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health. However, any suspension of religious freedom by the Government must be deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society."

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. An interfaith council exists, which includes representatives of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i organizations.

In December 2004, a minor controversy emerged over allegations that some stores' practice of buying halal products, particularly chickens, unfairly favored Muslim citizens at the expense of others. Newspapers featured a number of op-eds variously criticizing and defending halal. In the wake of these articles, graffiti denouncing halal appeared in some locations. The Botswana Muslim Association also publicly expressed concern about instances of Islamophobia in the local media, but its leaders maintained that, in general, Muslims did not suffer from discrimination or antagonistic attitudes.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives maintain regular contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador met with a range of religious leadership. The Embassy continued efforts to reach out to Islamic leaders to expand a dialogue on Islam between Americans and citizens of the country and continued developing relationships with influential Muslims in the community. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy expanded its interactions with faith-based organizations to promote the rights and welfare of women and young persons, care for orphans, and combat poverty by supporting income-generating activities.

Released on November 8, 2005

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51449.htm)